

New Life for McClellan

Story and Photos by
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THE buildings are boarded. Barricades prohibit access to many of the roads. And the BDU-clad military police who guarded the gates have been replaced by civilians in black, SWAT-like uniforms. All of these changes are reminders that Fort McClellan, Ala., is no more.

The military police, chemical and support units that shared the historic post have moved to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., leaving behind a much smaller “transition force” — formed shortly after the decision to close the installation in 1995 — to guide the fort’s operational closure. Its mission includes property disposal or transfer to new owners, protecting and maintaining personal and real property until the transfer, and controlling access to undeveloped areas to protect human health and the environment.

Transition to Closure

The task force started as a team of about 20 civilians and soldiers and grew to nearly 80 as the installation neared closure. That number has declined as soldiers assigned to the team reported to other duty stations.

In the early days of closure, the team also had to maintain a viable and bustling installation that, even in its last year of operation, trained more than 9,700 students.

“If you look at how other installations have closed, you will see that they had closure as their only mission,” said transition force commander COL David F. Treuting. “We had to continue training up until one month before the installation was scheduled to close, then close the installation. And now the tough job of disposing of

it properly accelerates.”

Closure procedures were simplified by a computer program, the Automated Installation Property System, which identified, tracked and removed property from the inventory system as it was turned over to the local reuse authority as mandated by the Base Reuse Implementation Manual.

“Once we got online with the AIPS, we were in good shape,” Treuting said. “I don’t know how we would have handled all the transfers of property without it.”

Much of the real estate has already changed hands through federal-to-federal transfers, but the bulk of the infrastructure, which will go to the local reuse authority, first has to meet environmental conditions permitting such transfers.

Reuse and Redevelopment

A large portion of fort property will be reused by federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, the Army Reserve and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Department of Justice opened the Center for Domestic Preparedness in September 1998 and operates in the former Army Chemical School. The center trains law enforcement, medical and other personnel tasked to respond to terrorist acts and incidents involving hazardous materials. The center has trained

more than 1,700 “first responders” and has brought 171 jobs to the area since the transfer.

In a partnership program, two federal agencies — Health and Human Services and the Center for Domestic Preparedness — will train medical personnel at the former Nobel Army Community Hospital.

More than a quarter of the installation’s acreage, including Pelham Range, was transferred to the Alabama Guard. LTC David McPherson, the Guard’s site manager, said more than 40,000 Guard and Reserve soldiers train at Pelham Range annually. The Army Reserve will use approximately 13.5 acres of fort property.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will manage more than 7,000 acres of land set aside as a wildlife refuge. According to Ron Smith, a natural resource biologist, the refuge is good news for local residents who enjoy hunting.

“The refuge will likely become a real tourist attraction for Alabama,” Smith said. “Once trails are cleared for hiking and camping, the refuge will bring in important tourist dollars. And the refuge is a wonderful way to



Technician Mark Roberts tests Fort McClellan ground water samples for potential contamination. Such environmental evaluations are part of the property-transfer process.

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A utility company worker trims a tree as part of an effort to help restore Fort McClellan power lines damaged by overgrown foliage.

preserve the beauty of Fort McClellan and give back to the community.”

The city of Anniston has taken over operation of the golf course, Truman Gym, and lakes Reilly and Yahoo. The post exchange and commissary remain open and are used by the large retiree community surrounding the fort property.

The once self-contained installation now uses the local police and fire departments to handle day-to-day security and caretaker responsibilities. Alabama Power has purchased the electrical system, and the Anniston Sewage and Water Works will assume control of the installation’s water and sewage system under a public-benefit conveyance.

The Joint Powers Authority, which is the local reuse agent, will acquire a “master lease” to most of the infrastructure, which will then be leased to private industry.

JPA director Ken Whitley said there is much industry interest in fort property and cited Auburn University’s plan to open a research center and canine training facility on the property.

“The long-term vision for the property includes educational, industrial and recreational facilities,” Whitley said. “McClellan has prime

real estate. Housing will probably be sold or leased early so that profits can be rolled into the reuse and redevelopment effort,” he said.

The JPA received a boost from a defense bill provision that authorizes the no-cost transfer of Fort McClellan for economic development, and from an announcement that an eastern bypass will be constructed through the post.

“The free conveyance of land cuts the time it takes to negotiate the lease and helps make reuse and redevelopment top priority,” Whitley said. “And the eastern bypass plan ties directly to the interstate, allowing local businesses to access the highway without having to deal with the interruption of traffic lights.



Emergency personnel decontaminate a simulated chemical casualty during Justice Department training at the former Army post.

“Over time, the net effect of revenues generated by the reuse of McClellan will be even greater than when McClellan was occupied by the Army entirely,” he said. “The quality of life that Calhoun County offers is unmatched. This area has a very low tax base and it’s really easy on the eyes with its beautiful landscape,” Whitley said. “I’m very optimistic about the future of McClellan.” □